



Adults should be vaccinated?!

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Vaccines are among the greatest public health achievements of the past 100 years and are a most effective way to reduce or prevent illness. Most people think that because they had their “shots” as children, they have no need for vaccination until maybe they are travelling abroad.

Vaccines protect a person from getting sick, but just as important is that they protect others from having it passed along to them. Being vaccinated shields family members and friends, co-workers and anyone else in close contact. This is especially crucial for those at high risk of the diseases vaccines prevent. Even with childhood vaccines there are some that need boosters into adulthood. There may also be some that were not available in childhood.

A vaccine is used to enhance or create immunity to a particular disease. It usually contains an agent that looks like the one causing the disease, often a weakened or killed form of the actual microbe or toxin. The body’s immune system recognizes the vaccine as foreign, and destroys it. It also preserves a memory of it so that it will be recognized and destroyed if exposed to it again.

The side effects of vaccination may include tiredness and a higher temperature as the body fights off the perceived threat. On very rare occasions, there may be an allergic reaction.

There are a series of routine and recommended vaccines for adults. The routine are for everyone; the recommended, for those most likely to face infection or serious implications.

The first of the routine vaccinations is for Tetanus, Diphtheria and Pertussis. Tetanus is an infection of the nervous system; Diphtheria affects the upper respiratory system, as does Pertussis (also called whooping cough). Of particular concern is Pertussis as there have been breakouts in Canada and the US. Vancouver Coastal Health has identified over 200 cases of whooping cough

since November 2011, a very worrying trend.

Also considered routine is the MMR vaccine that protects against Measles, Mumps and Rubella and anyone who has not been protected against these is strongly recommended to be vaccinated.

Another of the ‘childhood diseases’ is chicken pox. Caused by the Varicella-zoster virus, anyone who has previously had the illness is considered immune; if not, it would be wise to check with your doctor

Perhaps the single most recommended vaccine is the one for influenza. This is an annual ‘shot’ to prevent the flu and is recommended for all adults, particularly the elderly and those with chronic conditions like heart or lung disorders, diabetes, kidney disease. Indeed, anyone at high risk of complications from the flu.

Other vaccines for adults include one for pneumococcal infection that can cause severe illness like pneumonia and meningitis. Shingles is another concern arising from the Varicella-zoster (chicken pox) virus. It causes a painful, blistering skin rash, but a vaccine is available.

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) can cause cancer of the cervix along with anal or genital warts. The HPV vaccine protects against these and is recommended for women from age 10 and some men aged nine to 45. Hepatitis A and B both damage the liver and are easily transmitted. Again, vaccines can protect against both Hep A and B.

We might all feel very safe because vaccine-preventable disease is fortunately rare, but not so rare that we should ignore becoming protected. The thing about vaccines is that they are something of an insurance policy against tragic health problems and may never be needed, but we cannot know in advance. You just have to meet a single ‘victim’ of shingles or whooping cough to understand the danger. Makes more sense now, right?

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